

The University of Southern Mississippi
Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Reverend Daniel Q. Nguyen

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt
Interpreter: Angel Truong Phan

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An Oral History with Reverend Daniel Q. Nguyen, Volume 1043

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Biography

Reverend Daniel Quan Nguyen was born, one of five children, on July 15, 1941, in Tay Ninh Province (east of Saigon), South Vietnam. His parents were farmers and his father died when he was just a year old. Reverend Nguyen attended high school and university in Saigon, studying science and law, then becoming a high school math teacher. From 1968 to 1975, he served as an infantry commander in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army). He was stationed with the Fourth Battalion Regiment of the Seventh Division in the Mekong Delta. In 1971 Reverend Nguyen attended Leadership Corps for Vietnam training in Fort Knox, Kentucky, then married his wife, Suong Nguyen.

After the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, Reverend Nguyen was imprisoned in a reeducation camp near the Cambodian border for three years. Reverend Nguyen began pastoring and building Vietnamese Assembly of God underground churches in the Mekong Delta and had nine churches when he left Vietnam in 1995. In 1996 Reverend and Mrs. Nguyen moved to Biloxi, Mississippi, to pastor the Vietnamese Christian Assembly of God church. After the church building was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the church congregation moved north of Biloxi to D'Iberville. Reverend and Mrs. Nguyen have three children.

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

REVEREND DANIEL Q. NGUYEN

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Reverend Daniel Q. Nguyen and is taking place on August 29, 2011. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. English/Vietnamese interpretation is provided by Angel Truong Phan. Also present is Reverend Suong Nguyen, the wife of Reverend Daniel Nguyen.

VanZandt: And today is August 29, 2011. This is Linda VanZandt, and I'm here in Biloxi, Mississippi. I'm here with Angel Phan, who will be interpreting, if we need interpretation. And if you could, say your names.

D. Nguyen: My name is Daniel Nguyen. In Vietnam, my name Nguyen Quan (inaudible). In the passport Daniel Nguyen Quan (inaudible). And today, what do you like to interview about my life in the Vietnam?

VanZandt: I would be very interested to hear about, first, where you were born, if you can tell where and when you were born.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) You translate?

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: He said that he will be speaking in Vietnamese, but if you want, there are some things that he is able to say in English, he'll be able to speak in English as well. So it just makes the story more, where that they can hear his voice and hear his emotions in Vietnamese better.

VanZandt: I agree. Thank you, Reverend Nguyen. I think that would be best. And Angel, thank you, if you'll interpret for me.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. OK. (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: He was a farmer in Vietnam.

VanZandt: A farmer, OK. And where? Did he say where he was from?

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: In the Tay Ninh Province.

Phan: Tay Ninh (speaking Vietnamese).

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: He was—

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: No. (speaking Vietnamese) (laughter)

S. Nguyen: No. (speaking Vietnamese) (laughter)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Most time, I went, most time (inaudible) me there about eighty mile. She don't know.

Phan: A hundred kilometers equals eighty miles. Is that correct?

VanZandt: Yes. So is he saying from Saigon, that's where he—

D. Nguyen: Yeah, from Saigon.

VanZandt: Tay Ninh Province, sure.

Phan: Tay Ninh Province.

VanZandt: OK, yes. And you were—

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: And what year were you born, Reverend Nguyen?

D. Nguyen: I born in this place, a province, the name is Tay Ninh. You know?

VanZandt: Yes. T-A-Y N-I-N-H?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, right, right. And the far east of Saigon, one hundred kilometers. Yeah.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: And I born the day, 15 July, [19]41.

Phan: So July [15], 1941.

VanZandt: Nineteen forty-one?

Phan: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. And you were born in South Vietnam, then?

Phan: He just had a birthday.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, in the South Vietnam. Yeah, that my birthday.

VanZandt: Yes, you did. Happy birthday, late. (chuckles)

D. Nguyen: (chuckles)

Phan: Happy seventieth birthday.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: That's a big one.

D. Nguyen: It seventy-year birthday now. (laughter)

VanZandt: That's a big one. How did you celebrate?

D. Nguyen: We celebrated in our church, and next day the home, member bring the food to my church, and we enjoy. And they wish something, and they celebrate about pastor seventy years old.

VanZandt: Seventy years, that's a great celebration. And we should mention, too, you are pastor of—could you say the name of the church that you pastor?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. My name of the church is The Vietnamese Christian Assembly of God in Biloxi. But Katrina, hurricane, destroy the church building on the Oak Street, Biloxi, and now we rent a building in D'Iberville. And we have Sunday service there.

VanZandt: Good, OK. So your building was on Oak Street before Katrina?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, before, but now destroy everything.

VanZandt: Yes, yes. And now you're meeting in D'Iberville.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. And today, we should also mention, is the sixth anniversary of Katrina. Happened six years ago today, August 29. So maybe we'll talk a little bit about Katrina, too, later on, if you can share about that.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Well, Reverend Nguyen, you said you were a farmer in Vietnam.

D. Nguyen: No, no. My father and my mom the farmer, but during Vietnam I was graduated from school, and I go to university about the math. I was teacher of the high school, too.

VanZandt: You were a math teacher in high school.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, how wonderful.

D. Nguyen: We teach in the high school after six years, and during the war, the government called me join to the army, and we were officers of South Vietnam.

VanZandt: You were an ARVN [Army of Republic of South Vietnam]—

D. Nguyen: Yeah. We officers of the South Vietnam.

VanZandt: You were. What was your rank?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. About 1968 to 1975.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: I was the company commander, been the troop outside but the field with the Viet Cong every day, and we belong to the Fourth Battalion Regiment of Seventh Division in the Mekong Delta.

VanZandt: In the Mekong Delta.

D. Nguyen: In the Mekong Delta, but the field there, seven year. Seven year I am commander of the company, infantry commander.

VanZandt: Wow. Well, Reverend Nguyen, we may need to do a separate interview just about your war experiences, if that's OK, another time. Would that be all right?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: To spend some time on that?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Definitely, because there's a lot I would love to ask you about that time. Well, getting back to—your parents were farmers. Did you help, growing up as a child, did you help in the fields on the farm?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, because see when I grow up in the village, and the farmer, but I go to the school, and after school, I go to the Saigon, Saigon City that's there. I was graduate of the high school, and I have four year in university, two year of university of science, and two year of university of law.

VanZandt: Of law?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Science and law, you studied.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. So you went to school all the way through high school, and then to university in Saigon?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Was that typical of a boy growing up in Tay Ninh Province, that you were so educated?

D. Nguyen: I grow up attending about—I remember when I was sixteen years old, I came to Saigon. I stay Saigon. I go to high school in the Saigon.

VanZandt: Away from your family?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, away, but every month I come back. I come to see my mom because my dad, he die. He die in 1942.

VanZandt: Oh, when you were one year old.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, one years old, he die, and I grow up with my mom and my family.

VanZandt: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

D. Nguyen: We have five people in my family. I have one elder brother, a second elder brother, and one sister, and me, and after me one sister. Yeah.

VanZandt: So you were second to the youngest.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: May I ask how your father died?

D. Nguyen: My father die by, that time because I have two brother, doctor, and he graduate on to medical university, and he doctor. He told me maybe my father die by the mosquito bite.

VanZandt: Malaria?

D. Nguyen: Not a mosquito bite, but—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: But I don't know, malaria or something, but when die, the blood, the outside the skin so (inaudible). We don't know.

Phan: Malaria.

VanZandt: Malaria, it sounds like.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Do you remember a couple years ago when people were dying from mosquitoes?

VanZandt: West Nile virus; something like that.

D. Nguyen: Fever. Maybe (inaudible), the fever, fever, fever, blood.

VanZandt: Fever.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) In Vietnam the children have it.

VanZandt: OK. So that's what you think? And so your mother was raising six children alone.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. But she had one more, the stepfather. I have a stepfather.

VanZandt: You had a stepfather.

D. Nguyen: All my life, but he so good. He take care our family. He love the stepchildren, everything.

VanZandt: That's wonderful. So that was a good experience, it sounds like.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And did you always know you wanted to study science and law?

D. Nguyen: I study science two year because after that I need to earn money for by myself. I go to the teacher. I go to the high school teacher, three(?) high school teacher; go around. You know?

VanZandt: Yes.

D. Nguyen: Go around, yeah. But a lot of time we rode the Honda to go around, I'm a teacher. And after about six years teacher, the government (inaudible) because it

had the war so high this time. In 1967, they call me join to the army, but they call reserve officer. Reserve officer mean that you join a year in the war. After war, maybe you go out the army. But so that the reason to told at least the name of the (inaudible) officer training for reserve officer.

VanZandt: And where did you have officer training? Where was that?

D. Nguyen: We were training about nine month. Nine month and they send us out of the battlefield, but I (inaudible) the Mekong Delta because the Mekong Delta so good because it so good about food and everything. (laughter) And I go to Mekong Delta.

VanZandt: So that was a good place to go.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Because of the food from the river?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And the delta.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: You had plenty to eat.

D. Nguyen: But the mud, the lake, and the monkeys so bad, so good for during you were in the war.

VanZandt: Right. Did you say the monkeys were bad?

D. Nguyen: Monkey along the river, along the river because the Mekong Delta many rivers, like the (inaudible). Like (inaudible) in the Mekong Delta, the border of Cambodia and Vietnam. We belong to Seventh Division Infantry in the Four Corps belong to Mekong, Mekong Delta.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: And they send us every day in the battlefield. They call the battalion in for some battle, outside, the battlefield every day.

VanZandt: So you went through officer training, and then you served from 1968 to '75.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: In the Mekong Delta?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. But around this time, 1971, I was sending to Kentucky, Fort Knox, Kentucky.

VanZandt: Oh, Fort Knox, Kentucky.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. Fort Knox, Kentucky, over there about six months for training that they call Leadership Corps for Vietnam.

VanZandt: What year was that? Do you remember?

D. Nguyen: I was there, my rank is the first lieutenant. And training with forty-eight country around the world come there, and we joined the camp in Fort Knox. And I come to see the Fort Knox, the gold there, that they let me see, one time, gold in the (inaudible).

VanZandt: Wow, into Fort Knox. (laughter)

D. Nguyen: And you see so bright of the gold there.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. Was that the first time you'd left Vietnam?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. That the first time I left Vietnam. That the first time I came to United States.

VanZandt: What did you think about America, Fort Knox?

D. Nguyen: That they show that for good(?) because training from Monday to Friday, and Friday; Saturday, and Sunday, you are free.

VanZandt: Very busy.

D. Nguyen: And they bring you come to anywhere in the Kentucky to see. I come to the Ford factory, about autos and see many thing inside.

VanZandt: Interesting.

D. Nguyen: Every weekend we had a treat for us.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. Were you married then?

D. Nguyen: We—

S. Nguyen: After he come back.

VanZandt: After you came back.

D. Nguyen: I come back, and she work at the Air Vietnam and hostess, around hostess.

VanZandt: Hostess.

D. Nguyen: And we had (inaudible) the fiancé about four, five, six, seven, nine years.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. (laughter) Engaged for that long?

Phan: Engaged for nine years?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, nine years, and—

VanZandt: Why so long?

D. Nguyen: Why so long because that's time I went in army. Sometime I fear maybe I die suddenly, so that I don't decide to get married because I get married, maybe I die. So that when I come back from 1971 from United States, I come back, I move. I work in the (inaudible) Training Center, mean I training the soldiers for Vietnam. So that so sad(?) for me I get married.

VanZandt: Um-hm. What year were you married?

D. Nguyen: What year marry, 1972, the end of [19]71, but '72 we have my daughter, eldest daughter.

VanZandt: Your oldest daughter, OK. Well, Reverend Nguyen, you've had such an interesting life, and there's so many different questions I could ask you about that time, but can you tell me a little bit about any special memories that you have about Vietnam, that time? Of course, later on we'll talk in another interview about details, but just any memories that stand out about life in Vietnam and how difficult it was through those war years and then about your journey, leaving Vietnam.

D. Nguyen: Because that one thing, when I grow up and from 1941, I was born, and I grow up about eight years old, I see that so happy for my childhood and everything around so (inaudible) around me that was so happy, not, I think not poor. I lived in (inaudible) everything, so that I grow up and go to school, and I was a teacher. I got money and see, this life happy, OK, for my life. And I get married. My wife, she work with Air Vietnam so that we may be, that the couple they call so happy because we earn the salary so good for our life. So that I think when the—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: —President Ngo Dinh Diem, that's time I see he the good man. But after that I see some things about political not good.

VanZandt: So you felt like President Diem was a good—

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: —good leader and things were good under him?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, good leader.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: What do you remember about when he was killed? Do you remember?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. It was in 1963, and he and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu were killed by action of many, many general.

S. Nguyen: Officer.

D. Nguyen: And one thing in my life, I was in the army. I was a company commander, took my soldiers many time the Viet Cong assault overnight in the battlefield, (inaudible) assault. And so if you want unique about, company about seventy to eighty soldiers, but they assault my regiment for battalion about three hundred, four hundred, they assault, you only(?) seventy or eighty. But we try the artillery and the airfire support the whole night. So that, many time like that.

VanZandt: Yes. You remember that battle. And the South Vietnamese Air Force was very—

D. Nguyen: And then I had to because when we stay out overnight for the troop, and we make the bunkers so good by in the Mekong Delta, so easy, you make the bunker. You cut the coconut tree. You cut the tree. You make the tree on and you take the mud, cover, like the bunker. So when the Viet Cong attack, artillery sometime, they all will come. Sometime artillery kill (inaudible) explode on the sky, the (inaudible) down so that we were in the bunker, that's OK.

VanZandt: You were OK.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. But the Viet Cong outside wounded so many.

VanZandt: Well, you witnessed a lot. What do you remember about April 30, 1975? Where were you? And just talk about that.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. That I take one company on the north of Saigon.

VanZandt: The north of Saigon.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. We take care about security of the city, between the north, the Viet Cong came from the north, you know.

VanZandt: So you were working in security, trying to secure north of Saigon.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, security for Saigon, the north of Saigon. But the last time I take the troop up the (inaudible) center, the training center. I take a company, and I lead the other company on the north of Saigon. And the twenty(?) fifty-four, the (inaudible) move him to Saigon. That's time General Minh, Big Minh, you know, he declare, he declare whole army let out of everything, you know, made so that I make my troop, I told them get the whole gun(?) in one the school there.

VanZandt: There was a school there?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. We had a school there. I left the whole gun(?) there, and I come back to my home and my wife, she run away the other place. I don't know where.

VanZandt: (asking Mrs. Nguyen) You had gone. You had left.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. Left, but in the city, in the Saigon city.

S. Nguyen: In the city this time, there are bombs in the house of the president.

VanZandt: Yes. The presidential palace was bombed.

S. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Right. And so you told your troops to go. You dissolved—

D. Nguyen: Yeah. I left because she (inaudible) they left. And that's when I had the one Honda because I bring the Honda, come to the place. I leave it with my unit, my company.

VanZandt: The Honda.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, Honda. But I—

VanZandt: Motorcycle?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, motorcycle. I changed [into] civi[lian], the clothes.

VanZandt: You changed your clothes, took off your uniform.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Yes. And then where did you go? You went to your house to try to find—

D. Nguyen: Yeah. I go to my house, and I look for my house. Nobody, my wife, she ran away the other place. And my—

VanZandt: Did you think where she might have gone? Did you know?

D. Nguyen: No. But I think she anywhere, in my relative family. I think. I look for her every, and we met up.

VanZandt: You finally met up. Where did you find her?

D. Nguyen: I find her in the place—

S. Nguyen: My sister-in-law.

VanZandt: Your sister-in-law.

D. Nguyen: Sister-in-law in far away of my home.

VanZandt: Was that in Saigon?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, in Saigon.

VanZandt: In Saigon, too.

D. Nguyen: But the other district.

VanZandt: And what were you thinking, Reverend Nguyen? That must have been such a difficult time for your troops.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, difficult time my troop, but you no way, you no way you keep your troops because that's the time the whole thing collapsed and declare, Big Minh say nothing to do.

VanZandt: So you knew it was the end.

D. Nguyen: Yes, the end. And so I come home, and I wait. After ten days, they call to get to reeducation camp, to go to the camp, labor camp.

VanZandt: Yes. So you went to reeducation camp.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, labor camp.

VanZandt: For how long?

D. Nguyen: About three year.

VanZandt: Three years. And what did your family do? What do you remember, Mrs. Nguyen, about that?

S. Nguyen: You mean after he go to the camp?

VanZandt: When you found out he was going? Did you know how long you would be there, Reverend Nguyen?

S. Nguyen: No. We don't know yet because they told them only three days. But they send them everywhere. We don't know where, so we are very confused this time, and we don't have anything. And this time, I work for Air Vietnam, Vietnam airline, but—

VanZandt: Vietnam Airlines.

S. Nguyen: Yeah. But I work on the ground. We check the boarding pass, the ticket, to when you go abroad in the country. We do it with Air France and China Airline, Singapore Airline, like that. Yeah. But because this time, the end of April, [19]75, if we want to go out, it's very easy because we work at the airport. And MACV [Military Assistance Command] from the United States.

VanZandt: Yes, MACV.

S. Nguyen: They let our friend, they have a relative, but because we work there, they know us, and if I want to go to the United States, it's OK, but I don't know where is my husband this time because we don't have a cell phone this time. And I just ask my brother. My brother, he's older than me, three years older, but he's been in the United States before, about six months or nine months for training, and I ask him can I go to the United States? He say, "Oh, no! You think that American is good? No." So I don't go because I can't contact with him, too. So I this time have two daughters, and I still working because from beginning of April [19]75 because we check in the domestic flight and international flight, and every embassy in Saigon in Vietnam, they left. Every day they left, and they say, "Oh, you don't afraid VC [Viet Cong]?" They asked us.

VanZandt: They asked if you were afraid of the VC?

S. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But every day we wait for the flight, domestic flight from the Highlands, Danang, from the central of Vietnam, they come, many, many of them, and they in a hurry, and in the face, they are with fear. But because this time we don't know how about VC because even I think my husband or the other officials in the South, they don't know exactly who is VC.

VanZandt: You didn't know who to trust.

S. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Or who was VC.

S. Nguyen: But we think that because we only the worker, so if this government or the other government, it's OK with us. So we think about that like this. But when the Communists come and haul them to the camp, and we believe that someday he will come back. But after nine months, we don't have any news from them, and we are very, very afraid, but we want to send some food or something because when they call them, they don't ask them to bring food or clothes because they say only three day. Uh-huh, yeah. And this time and I still work for Air Vietnam, but we don't have any work to do because the agents from the North, they send. But because they don't know how to do with the ticket or the paper, but—

VanZandt: You knew how, but they didn't know how to do.

S. Nguyen: Yeah. And every day we must show up, and sometime they tell us to do outside, pick up the trash or something, yeah, or clean the room out in the building at the airport or something like that. And after that, after a few—no, maybe six month or more, and then I receive one paper from them because my husband go to the camp. So they said that now I quit working with them. So yeah, I'm—

VanZandt: You couldn't work anymore.

S. Nguyen: Yeah. Because of the relative with the officer in the South.

VanZandt: And what some people don't know is because you were an officer with the South, then your family was affected more than others. And you, and Reverend Nguyen, do you feel like sharing anything about that time in a reeducation camp for people who don't know what that was—

D. Nguyen: A year I was in the camp, I think—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: In the camp, about one year later, they let permission—

S. Nguyen: To go to see.

D. Nguyen: —that the wife come to see.

VanZandt: You could come see.

D. Nguyen: And they send the food, but limit about three kilo for the food one time.

VanZandt: Of what, rice?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, rice or something, salt and sugar, everything.

VanZandt: So during that three years, did you ever try to—

D. Nguyen: In three years, I think so the Lord protect because one day we hear about one bowl of rice, but we had to show (inaudible) the rice bowl. We plant the rice (inaudible).

VanZandt: You planted—

D. Nguyen: And we plant the whole labor, plants, everything, the (inaudible) (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) And plant outside.

VanZandt: Could you eat what you planted?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. We ate, we plant.

S. Nguyen: This time they send him to near Tay Ninh, near his province, and then—

D. Nguyen: In the border of Cambodia.

S. Nguyen: Near the (speaking Vietnamese).

D. Nguyen: The border.

VanZandt: That's where you were.

S. Nguyen: The border of the Cambodia.

VanZandt: Yes. That's where your camp was.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, the camp there.

S. Nguyen: Yeah, very far.

D. Nguyen: Far away Province Tay Ninh. So we cut the tree in the forest, sometime, booby trap. You know booby trap?

VanZandt: Yes.

D. Nguyen: Small one during the war, pull down everything inside the forest, sometime you jump on the explode, they cut your leg, so that we use one (inaudible) the summer so hot, and the rain. We burn the forest because when you burn the forest, the booby trap will explode.

VanZandt: Explode.

D. Nguyen: Explode, everything inside, and sometime we get so smoke, white smoke anymore inside and for the food, too. And we fight (inaudible) whole thing in the forest. And after two year, a (inaudible) for us when we move in forest for labor, labor, sometime cut the wood, the makeup of the Viet Cong, mean if you build a house, you sleep the house six months, you must destroy the house to build a bigger house, and destroy the house. They want you have labor so that build and destroy, build, destroy, all (inaudible) sometime you go to the forest, you make the shackle. And they bring the shackle, go to the market sell, and they buy something for you. And that is so—

S. Nguyen: Yeah. That's his work in the camp.

VanZandt: You worked hard.

D. Nguyen: Um-hm.

S. Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: And you were telling a story. One day you had one bowl of rice.

D. Nguyen: One bowl, only one bowl of rice. (inaudible) which kind, we call (inaudible), you know (inaudible), was special, easy you plant. They yield (inaudible) overnight and everything (inaudible). And they make for the vegetable to grow up so good. And so many doctor there, too, but if you are a doctor, you take care about dirty. And everything dirty because they told doctor not so good about (inaudible), so good everything, so that doctor must be doing so that in there in the place you put everything.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: So you had doctors there to—

D. Nguyen: No so many doctor there.

VanZandt: Did they help you stay healthy?

D. Nguyen: But we sometime after—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: After doctor go to the—me, and the doctor go to labor camp, and after one, about six months, they cannot (inaudible) so good about medical in the labor camp. They call the doctor can join with them do something in the help (inaudible).

VanZandt: Right, sure.

D. Nguyen: And everything for them, too, and the one doctor because he had—what did (inaudible) die?

VanZandt: Appendix?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah. And he—

VanZandt: Rupture?

D. Nguyen: And they make the (inaudible) you—

VanZandt: To operate.

D. Nguyen: You had (inaudible) the operation, and the doctors brought the letter, give me. “Hey, (inaudible), you keep my letter, maybe I die. You bring my letter to my wife.” Because the operation like that, you know, maybe I die. But thank God, he not die. (laughter)

VanZandt: (heavy sigh) Oh, yes. So you didn’t know what was going to happen, but when you were freed, tell me about that day when you were freed. Did you know you were going to be, or just surprised?

D. Nguyen: Because I think we release you, but you don’t know how long, how many years. Maybe they make you die in the camp.

VanZandt: How did you deal with that, Reverend Nguyen, in your mind? How did you keep going day by day to survive?

D. Nguyen: Day by day, in my mind, our (inaudible) would some time be together, two or three in the forest for labor, and we fellowship with together. Maybe they kill us by so heavy and no food, but we try. We try. We try by ourselves because sometime we plant something for food, extra food, and we make something in the forest. One time we saw a whale(?), but wonder why and (inaudible) but we don’t know. And we cut the tree, the long tree, and everyone wanted to make the (inaudible) of the tree, and we put down, put down and cut the (inaudible) in the

whale, and after we don't hear. We hear the silence, and one guy (inaudible) and take out the big, like that, you know, and we cut and we divide; so good for sick people.

VanZandt: A lot of people could enjoy and live off that. So you learned to survive.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. We learn survive because when we army, the army training, how we survive when we have the situation not good for our life. So that's the—you come to the forest, and sometime you look the fruits you can eat and mushroom and sometime. But we learn eat the mushroom, you have the bright color and show bright color, that poison.

VanZandt: Poison.

D. Nguyen: But if you look the white and so smooth, that OK.

VanZandt: That's OK to eat.

D. Nguyen: In fact, when you eat, eat the lid(?) first, and you wait. And you eat—(laughter).

VanZandt: You had to learn what was good and what was bad, what you could eat, and what you couldn't.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And one time I remember in my mind, when the big (speaking Vietnamese).

S. Nguyen: The big snake?

Phan: Anaconda.

D. Nguyen: Big, but they shed the skin, you know. They shed the skin, so long time about many feet. And at the (inaudible) cover, and when we move we cut(?), what was some time so smooth, you know, and we careful and we take the big one, *long*.

VanZandt: From the river.

D. Nguyen: About twenty meter.

VanZandt: Twenty meters.

D. Nguyen: Twenty meter. And it so big, but—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: But the one, one tribe(?) people in the army, he experienced. He experienced.

VanZandt: What did he do?

D. Nguyen: And we divide two, three, four, of the wild animal, and we go to the forest, we have the sharp, the sharp, try to cut, you know—

VanZandt: Um-hm.

D. Nguyen: And we divide six people along the way.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: And we say (makes sound of big chop), “*One*, two, three, you cook now and make they look, (repeats sound of big chop) *One!*”

Phan: You use the opportunity whenever they took(?) the machete, and I guess the guys got together to—

D. Nguyen: And we cut and (inaudible) we carry back to camp. So many labor, so many person in the camps say, “*Hey!* The white meat. Get me a little meat, a little meat.” (others speaking simultaneously) Because we like all the meat, we like all the meat so long time.

Phan: They were hungry.

D. Nguyen: We hungry. We have no meat. We eat, we (inaudible) vegetable (inaudible) every day, so that we need the meat.

VanZandt: Protein. You needed protein. That’s an amazing story.

S. Nguyen: (chuckles)

D. Nguyen: But easy, you take the monkey. We learn to make up, the tribe people; the red pepper, you know.

VanZandt: Red pepper.

D. Nguyen: Red pepper so hot, you know.

VanZandt: *Ooh.*

D. Nguyen: We plant that, and we make, (inaudible) the water. And we bring to forest, and we saw so many monkey on the tree. And we let the water be, no pepper. You put on my face, my eye, everything, and we left the pepper water in the fruit on the tree, and go far away, and you hide, and you see they come down, and they

(inaudible) in the water with the pepper, the fruit, in their eye, (chuckles) and he cannot see. And we use—beat them, beat them.

VanZandt: So you had monkey, too, to eat.

D. Nguyen: Yeah!

S. Nguyen: (laughs)

D. Nguyen: And we ate the monkey meat because we have no meat. But—

VanZandt: (heavy sigh) Oh, you're so smart to use your head—very smart—

D. Nguyen: Yeah, but so good, but monkey meat, we ate, so good, nothing.

VanZandt: Tasted so good, sure. (all laugh) Reverend Nguyen, that's amazing.

Phan: Did they taste like chicken?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. (all laugh)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Tastes good when you're hungry.

D. Nguyen: When you hungry, you so hungry, and you skinny, skinny.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: Nineteen seventy-five to 1978, you know. Three year.

Phan: During 1975 to 1978.

S. Nguyen: Three years in the camp.

VanZandt: Three years.

Phan: In the camp, and they lost a lot of things.

D. Nguyen: When I declare (inaudible).

Phan: (speaking simultaneously) And so they were in survivor mode.

D. Nguyen: I keep the (inaudible), I declare (inaudible) and I cannot delay whole thing. If I declare, I go to outside the state for training, maybe ten year,

VanZandt: Yes.

D. Nguyen: Because they doubt(?), you are the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or something.

VanZandt: So you were lucky to get out after three years, not longer.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. After three years, we hide many things. We don't declare declaration(?) with them.

VanZandt: You didn't. So what they did in reeducation camp, they wanted you to sign and say you agreed with the Communist way. You would live the Communist way.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. But *every* month, they left the paper. But I keep in my pocket. If I declare something, I keep, and they declare the paper, and the next time, I keep—

VanZandt: Keep the paper.

S. Nguyen: Yeah.

D. Nguyen: And one time he call me to the office. He told me, "You hide everything. *You*, so many things, but you don't declare." He make everything for maybe they cut you, maybe they fire(?) you, keep—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Torture you.

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: They tortured him.

D. Nguyen: And he keep the gun, he hit the gun. He hit on the table (demonstrates), "You hide everything—

Phan: All their rules. Declared what they wanted.

D. Nguyen: —*now*, I want you declare. Why you don't declare?" I say, "I hide nothing. Only one thing I declare for you. I have nothing in my life during the army. I don't have." They told me, "Did you kill us?" I say, "No. Because I go with the truck outside. What they show you kill? But I don't kill. I the commander."

VanZandt: Right.

D. Nguyen: “I don’t kill.”

VanZandt: The commander doesn’t kill. The soldiers do.

D. Nguyen: (all laugh) Yeah.

VanZandt: Did he like that answer? (all laugh)

D. Nguyen: “But my order, but I don’t kill.” But they say, “What gun do you use?” Because he told me, “Maybe you use gun when you shot the dog?” I say, “Oh, right. I sometime shot the dog because, hey, what you say? Why you say that?” Because I say, “I American troop, Ninth Division, near my unit, they saw that, they (inaudible) American (inaudible) so that many talk and they can decide they come around.

Phan: (asks Linda) So was he an officer for the Southern or the Northern Vietnamese?

VanZandt: Reverend Nguyen?

Phan: Yes.

VanZandt: For Southern, South Vietnamese Army.

Phan: South Vietnamese Army, OK.

VanZandt: Seventh Division.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And so sometime my soldier and with me go to buy Honda motorcycle come to shot the dog and bring the dog meat. (laughter) I told them that all! He crazy, but he said, “You tell something I don’t like.” But I pray the Lord. I *keep* my mind; don’t declare something more.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: When I was in United States, I go to the church every Sunday with my mom, American mom; she adopt me because she went when I was in the Fort Knox, and one American lady come to church with my general. She wanted adopt one Vietnamese official. But when the general call me come to meet her, I ask her, “Why you want to adopt one Vietnamese official?” She said me, “I had a son, pilot, and die in the Bien Hoa, so that I don’t know, I don’t know about Vietnam. I want to know, so that I can adopt you, and you come to my home and fellowship with me and tell

with me something about Vietnam, about the pilot, everything.” And she loved me. Every week she give me thirty dollar. (laughter)

Phan: He had mentioned in his story that during that time he prayed, but so I wondered, when did you start going to church or knowing Jesus? And he said that he didn’t come to the Lord until he had been adopted by his American mom.

VanZandt: So when were you adopted by your American mom? After you got out of camp?

D. Nguyen: Because she came, she want to adopt because she asked the general commander of the camp.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Yes.

D. Nguyen: And one evening I was training, adopt mean that she care of you because in the army when you go to United States for training—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: —one high official take care of you, and one civilian family take care of you. They want to bring you outside the camp on Sunday go to the church or go fellowship.

VanZandt: So where did she live in America?

D. Nguyen: She lived in Louisville; in Louisville, Kentucky.

VanZandt: But she came to Vietnam?

D. Nguyen: No. When I was in the camp (inaudible) in Kentucky she die, and when—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: She adopt when I was training in—

VanZandt: When you were training—I see.

D. Nguyen: In Kentucky.

VanZandt: When you said “camp,” I thought you meant after reeducation camp. So she was here in Louisville, Kentucky, and she adopted you when you came for training?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: OK. So then did you keep—were you able to communicate after—

D. Nguyen: I communicate with her during the time training. When I come back in my country, continue my duty in the army, she write, she told me, “Mom will pray for you until I die.” Because many times she brought me to the church, Methodist Church in Louisville.

VanZandt: Methodist Church.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And one time I come back, I look for her home, too, and I look for the church, Methodist Church, the big building there, Methodist Church. Many times she brought me to Methodist Church on Sunday service.

VanZandt: Do you still keep in touch with her? Is she still alive?

D. Nguyen: No. She die. But my daddy(?), he die, too.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) I asked him, during that time how old he was, and he said he was thirty.

VanZandt: Thirty years old. So she had a great effect on your life, it sounds like.

D. Nguyen: Um-hm. That time she about fifty, fifty-six years old, and she call my son. And one time I remember a souvenir with her family. One time I told her, one day it my birthday, but I forgot. And the end of the week, she call, “Hey, Quan(?)” This time my name is Quan(?), not Daniel. “Hey, Quan, you remember your birthday?” “Oh, Mom, birthday in Vietnam I never do about birthday, happy birthday.” She say, “Come my home. I take care everything.” And so that she invite so many women because she the leader of the women of the city. I don’t know, about forty women (Linda chuckles), and they ask me, “I want to make one special food, Asian food.” I say—(speaking Vietnamese).

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Fried rice.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And they bring me to supper and they shop, and I bought something, and I teach them how do. They learn. (laughter) I say something, only one (speaking Vietnamese). And so that's when I come in my barrack in the Fort Knox, my daddy he bring so many gift in the car, fifty people, I have fifty box of the gift. (laughter)

VanZandt: (laughs) Oh, my goodness. She sounds wonderful.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, Reverend Nguyen, when you made it out after reeducation camp and you went back to your family, can you just talk about how you decided to leave Vietnam? About that decision. Why did you decide to leave?

D. Nguyen: After they release me, I got malaria fever, and so my body skinny, about forty-two kilo [about ninety-two pounds], so that—

Phan: What kind of fever did he have?

VanZandt: Probably malaria.

Phan: Malaria.

VanZandt: He had a high fever.

D. Nguyen: And so—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Lost a lot of weight.

D. Nguyen: My mind so depressed. I'm haunting my wife and show everything in my house and nothing. Every, like hot(?) food and so suffering like. And one time I want to decide suicide by myself. I kill myself. And use string up hammock, army hammock we have, hammock of the army, the big string, when you cut on the tree—

VanZandt: Part of a hammock, the way it holds—

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And so I decide make the string for myself, kill myself, but I look on the ceiling, "Oh, if I die, my wife have no money for bury me, and (inaudible) on my body." And the last time I call (inaudible) "God, rescue me," because during the time in United States ninety-first(?), you know, I go to the church every Sunday. I say, "Oh, if there a God, rescue me." And so I hear about the voice outside my ear, and I feel cool in my body.

VanZandt: You felt cool.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, cool my body, and God say, “I love you.” And I wait for this afternoon, this evening, my sister, the relative my sister, she come, she share, and she bring me to the church.

S. Nguyen: She a Christian.

D. Nguyen: And she a Christian, and now she the wife of the one pastor in California, and she bring me to the church. I believe easily because you know—and I have a tithes every Sunday, go to church. I join the church, and the (inaudible) was so simple and so everything, every week we whole family there. And the pastor, he take care of me, and I love it so much in the church and share the Lord with one group to take care in the church.

VanZandt: Was that in Saigon? Where was that?

D. Nguyen: Saigon.

VanZandt: What kind of church was it?

D. Nguyen: The church, that church belong to Fourth District.

VanZandt: Fourth District.

D. Nguyen: Fourth District, and that’s a church I make and build. But now, the Viet Cong government, they took for the music play for the children, and so the pastor was in jail seven years, and now he has been in Seattle(?), California. And my pastor, we were baptized with him during that time, in 1980, the year. And so—

VanZandt: So God spoke to you.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: You said you heard a voice outside your ear and saved you.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, because I think the Lord want to save me because I want to decide kill myself, because in the army you don’t fear everything. But one thing, and I so funny, when I decided, I see it, no clothes, one shock on my body, and I see, “Maybe my wife have no money for bury, for funeral.” And I think, “What do we do for family when we were suffering while you decide?” I think so. And the Lord, I say, “Lord, if you have, I many time come to the church, but I have no way.” And the Lord spoke in my ear. So that, I feel so cool in my mind, everything. And the Lord changed my sister this evening come to, invite me come to the church. And I think the Lord do everything for my life so that now I promise with the Lord, I share Lord all my life. When I die, I always (inaudible). And when whole family come to United States, we live in Dallas one month, and one rich family, they have the gasoline

station. He had three station of gasoline. He told me, “My uncle,” he call me uncle, “we want to let the one gas station for family take care. May you get, need ten thousand a month for you,” but I think I never do that, and the Lord call me, and I assure them I don’t, the gas station owner, do in the gas station everything for my family.

VanZandt: So you were in Dallas, you’re saying then.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: And you decided to follow the Lord and to go into the ministry then?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah. But we live there one month, and when the Vietnamese Assembly pastor, he call me because he have been in Vietnam many time, I got him go to Mekong Delta for because I were minister in Mekong Delta. When the Viet Cong release me three year, after three year, and I join to the church, and I will be pastor after nine year. After nine year, I will be—

VanZandt: So you were pastoring then after camp, in the Mekong Delta.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, in Vietnam, yeah. And so I take care of Mekong District, and I come to establish a church, one church, two church, and when I leave Vietnam, I have nine church in the Mekong Delta.

Phan: Wow. That’s amazing.

VanZandt: How did you do that, Reverend Nguyen, with the Communists in control?

D. Nguyen: Because the Lord call me, “You come and you organize the people. You training and you guide the people go to church a lot and come to everybody. You share with them. You brung to live like Jesus.” We use the boats, small boats. They come to the village; they come to village and if the people in the house have relative, they come to testimony about Jesus for them, and we establish a church, and we stay them. My goal, you stay with them, you share Gospel, and we eat with them, together with them, and you pray after the church.

VanZandt: Did you have to meet secretly, underground?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, yeah, underground.

S. Nguyen: Because at this time we (inaudible).

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah. Some time police arrest, but we—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: So what you were doing was very dangerous.

D. Nguyen: It dangerous, why we move the place to place.

VanZandt: Yes.

D. Nguyen: We sometime, you stay in my home, in the home of the people, but in the night I go outside a small, mostly out in the field for the dark, everything. We live there for (inaudible).

VanZandt: And were the people afraid to let you speak with them?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, be with them and eat with them and live together with them and teach them and training them and pray after to build, establish the church, and the church move, and the church move, and the church move.

S. Nguyen: Because he take care for the Mekong Delta because this time we work with the Vietnamese Assembly of God underground church, and they are (inaudible) and he the pastor for the Mekong Delta region, so he have many Christian worker we call (inaudible), follow, that means the young people.

VanZandt: Following you.

S. Nguyen: To show the Lord, yeah.

D. Nguyen: Because when we decide establish the Vietnamese Assembly general council in Vietnam, five people. I were one people of the five staff of general council, you know. And so that we training by the (inaudible), the American missionary came to Vietnam, and we pray in the place for training about twenty people, and *so amazing*, and the Lord bless, you know. Sometime they bring only for the food for you, and you call many people come for training, and you cook the food for them and rent(?) the place, to rent place for them. In one week or two week, sometime the police came, and we move the place.

VanZandt: Sounds like they took care of you, and you took care of them.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, because see, when we in army, you had to move, and you have to keep it secret, how training. But one thing, the Lord keep my life, call my life because during the war I met one (inaudible) officer for when the colonel, American colonel; he carry radio for colonel when I come back from the Fort Knox. I work with the TOC [tactical operations center], mean the tactical in the D.C.(?) and I met the colonel and take the map, everything, for Vietnam because at that they believe me; I was training in America, so that they believe me.

VanZandt: Trusted you.

D. Nguyen: And they come to join to (inaudible) American. When I met the colonel, his name Schroeder(?), and I met the (inaudible) officer carry the radio for him, and his name, (inaudible), they were there, and when he after the Vietnam War, he come back, he smoke, (inaudible) everything, and his wife divorce him. And he wandering, and one pastor, American pastor, call him to the church, and he come down here, and he go to the Bible school. And after Bible school he came to Vietnam. He want to come to Vietnam. And he told me he pray a lot, “I come to Vietnam. I want meet the one, somebody,” we pray after the church in Vietnam, you know, and training in Vietnam. And he goes to street, and he goes on the street. He saw me, “Hey, look, you. Hey, maybe you remember me?” He said to me, “Hey, you remember me? I lived in Vietnam.” “Hey, where? During the war in Vietnam, where you live in?” “Hey, Cai Lay(?).” (laughter) He told me Cai Lay(?), mean the city Cai Lay(?), Mekong Delta. “Oh! I remember you. You carry radio of Colonel Schroeder.” He said, “Oh, yeah. You come to TOC, you come to the place of the colonel. You took the map, everything there. You drink coffee with me. You don’t remember?” I say (whispering), “Hey, come to hotel. I share with you.” Everything he share. He one raise(?) up the church in Vietnam. Training, we have the money for training. Also, his church send him missionary. And he, “OK.” And he take care of me. And he take me and they call people for training. And from that, now he still missionary in Vietnam.

VanZandt: He’s still—and this is a picture of him you’re showing.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And he—

VanZandt: For the recording, we’re looking at a photograph. This is—

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: No. Chester.

VanZandt: Chester? OK.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: So he’s still a missionary in Vietnam.

S. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And he battled drug addiction.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, the Owl(?) River, you know? He Mekong Delta, he wounded by the grenades.

VanZandt: He was wounded by grenades.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: You can see on his face, yes.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: But I met Owl River, too.

VanZandt: And this is him.

S. Nguyen: And his wife, yeah.

VanZandt: And his wife was there, too.

S. Nguyen: Yeah (laughs).

VanZandt: And where was this in Saigon?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, now general council.

VanZandt: Last year?

S. Nguyen: Last year the government there allow the Vietnamese Assembly of God underground church a permit to—

D. Nguyen: And they recognize now.

VanZandt: Permit.

S. Nguyen: To—

D. Nguyen: Permit and—

VanZandt: To worship legally.

S. Nguyen: To preach the Gospel. (laughs)

D. Nguyen: He share with me I so good to tell his story.

S. Nguyen: This my Vietnamese—

D. Nguyen: Superintendent.

S. Nguyen: —superintendent in Vietnam.

VanZandt: Your superintendent.

D. Nguyen: Here the young people.

VanZandt: So he's working here and living there now.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. He work by social welfare in Vietnam.

S. Nguyen: Because he in the war.

VanZandt: Changed his life. Yes.

S. Nguyen: He miss the eye, the ear.

VanZandt: I see his eye, ear, and mouth.

S. Nguyen: The mouth and everything.

VanZandt: Due to a grenade.

D. Nguyen: One time when he was in the Japan coffee(?) store, the (inaudible), come to his friend and left the ring on the back, and his wife kiss and said him, "I love you. I never leave you." And take care of him, and so now he go around the world, and especially he love Vietnam because he told me, during the war, he many things in Vietnam. Now he show Vietnam for missionary.

VanZandt: Now he's helping.

D. Nguyen: He take care so big money(?) for social welfare.

VanZandt: Social welfare.

D. Nguyen: About children, about hobby(?) store, about drug addiction, you know.

S. Nguyen: In the war he bring the gun, M16, but now he bring *John 3:16*. (laughter)

VanZandt: *John 3:16*.

D. Nguyen: He said with Vietnam like that.

VanZandt: Can you say, for the record, *John 3:16*? (laughter) "For God so loved the world"—

D. Nguyen: Yeah, loved the world.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese simultaneously)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)—the Lord loved the world (speaking Vietnamese) mean keep the only son.

S. Nguyen: So “God so loved the world”—

D. Nguyen: For you.

S. Nguyen: —that he give His only son, Jesus, die on the cross.

D. Nguyen: For you who believe.

S. Nguyen: Who believe in him.

D. Nguyen: You have—

VanZandt: —eternal life.

S. Nguyen: It’s a new life.

D. Nguyen: Your whole life, eternal life, you know.

VanZandt: That’s right. One of my favorite scriptures. We need to keep—do we have a few minutes?

Phan: Oh, yeah. I think we have (inaudible). I was just making sure that (inaudible).

VanZandt: Yes, yes. Thank you. OK. That’s an amazing story. It’s so wonderful to hear these connections that have lasted over your lifetime with people that you met and had intense experiences with during the war. So how did you leave Vietnam? Can you tell us how you got to the United States? Tell us about that journey.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know because after we leave, after three years of reeducation camp, and I stay in Vietnam, I share the Lord ten year in Vietnam. And I was training by American Assembly in Vietnam, too, and I got the ordained license and all from American Assembly, Springfield; headquarter in the Springfield, Missouri.

VanZandt: In Missouri. OK.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, in Missouri, and we training the other people, and we share the Lord. And we keep in mind, “Maybe I stay Vietnam.” But many time police arrest me, come to police station. “Why you don’t go out? You have a girlfriend for

(inaudible), but why you don't leave Vietnam?" I say, "I want to share the Lord. I want stay in Vietnam."

VanZandt: So they wondered why you were staying in Vietnam.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: You had a chance to leave.

D. Nguyen: Police ask me, "Why? Why you don't go out?"

VanZandt: What did you say?

D. Nguyen: I say, "I want to share the Lord." I don't lie.

VanZandt: You told them you'd like to share the Lord.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. I like share the Lord, but—

S. Nguyen: (inaudible; speaking simultaneously)

D. Nguyen: But the captain police say, said to me, "I don't like you stay Vietnam. If you want to stay in Vietnam you sign the paper. You decide stay Vietnam," because I told them I cannot sign. "If I sign, maybe you put me in jail, again."

VanZandt: So what did signing the paper mean? What would that mean if you signed it?

D. Nguyen: Sign mean that you want to stay in Vietnam. You don't want to go to United States(?), you know. And so that I think in mind, "If I sign that, I depend on them."

S. Nguyen: Because this time the government here, they have a program for the officer—

VanZandt: That's right.

S. Nguyen: —in the South. If you in the [reeducation] camp at least three years, you can go—

VanZandt: You could come to America.

S. Nguyen: —here as refugees.

VanZandt: That's right. Thank you for explaining that, Mrs. Nguyen. So you had an opportunity to come if you wanted to.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, but I have a time go to United States, America, but I think I want to stay in Vietnam. But after three year more and ten year, I say something so good for me, but police, they don't like. Police arrest me and my wife, too.

VanZandt: They were arresting you.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. I question, I doubt you CIA. And I have a—

VanZandt: They thought you were CIA.

S. Nguyen: (chuckles)

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And I have the plan send missionary into Cambodia. He trained, the spy follow me in the Cambodia sometime (inaudible) in the place I share Gospel. And something, he took so many picture where I live, how I do, what, where I do.

VanZandt: Did he show you those pictures?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So he had been photographing you.

D. Nguyen: And he call me, the police show me, "I follow you five year."

VanZandt: Five years he'd followed you.

D. Nguyen: Five. "I follow you five years. But now I think you crazy man."

VanZandt: For not leaving to go to America?

D. Nguyen: "Not CIA, but you crazy man about share Gospel. So that I don't like you stay Vietnam. I want you go out. If you want to stay, you sign the paper. You want to stay Vietnam."

VanZandt: So that's when you decided you needed to leave?

D. Nguyen: No, no, I don't sign. I say, "I don't sign." They say, "If you don't sign, you go out." OK. I ask him, "It easy go out?" "Easy. You let the paper. You fill out everything. Next month I give you passport go out." I fill out, so—

VanZandt: He was tempting you.

D. Nguyen: (laughter) But one thing I think that the time the Lord send me out after ten years.

S. Nguyen: This time he's in the United States, in the—

VanZandt: Fort Knox.

S. Nguyen: —training camp, Fort Knox, yeah.

VanZandt: Yes. Oh, my goodness. You have all these photographs. (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) Well, I would like sometime to bring my scanner and scan these pictures for you.

S. Nguyen: Yeah, because we still have a little (laughter)—

VanZandt: Oh. This is you?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

S. Nguyen: After he finish—

VanZandt: University?

S. Nguyen: —training.

VanZandt: Training, in Kentucky?

D. Nguyen: No. I think in Long Beach, when I come back to Vietnam, go by train, they give me the (inaudible), but we, five people, should go by train from Kentucky to California, and I come to Long Beach, United States.

VanZandt: Oh, look at you. Oh, my goodness. And where was this? In Vietnam?

D. Nguyen: This the Air Vietnam, my brother, when he radiation pilot.

VanZandt: Oh, they were pilots?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, they wear pilot's uniform.

S. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

D. Nguyen: No. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: South Vietnamese Air Force?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: One, two, three of them.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, three. That why I don't know where he—

S. Nguyen: That's him. You see?

VanZandt: Yes! (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) I can see. He's handsome. Handsome picture.

S. Nguyen: (laughter)

VanZandt: At the beach.

S. Nguyen: We here—

VanZandt: Is that you?

S. Nguyen: Yeah, it's me.

VanZandt: *Beautiful.* Oh, my goodness. She was a looker.

D. Nguyen: Forty years.

VanZandt: Forty years.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So what year did you leave Vietnam?

D. Nguyen: Well, we leave Vietnam 1995.

VanZandt: Not till 1995.

S. Nguyen: Yeah. (inaudible; speaking simultaneously)

D. Nguyen: They fly the end, (inaudible).

VanZandt: Tell me what made you decide to leave?

D. Nguyen: When I think I decide to leave because the government don't like me to stay in Vietnam, and so that I decide I go out and share the Lord. But I go—

VanZandt: How did you leave? Did you have a sponsor here in the United States?

S. Nguyen: By airplane.

D. Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: You just left by—you were able to because you were—

D. Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) you leave, mean you have Program Echo(?), mean officer, government American ambassador in Thailand let you go.

VanZandt: Yes. You just signed—

D. Nguyen: And so that you decide, you sign.

VanZandt: Yes.

D. Nguyen: You sign with Vietnam. Vietnam give you passport because they allow you go because of program of America.

VanZandt: So you got a passport. Signed the papers.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, passport from Vietnam.

S. Nguyen: We got interview, and we have—

VanZandt: Did you want to leave, too?

S. Nguyen: Yeah. All the family.

D. Nguyen: And (inaudible) American interview.

VanZandt: How many children?

S. Nguyen: Interview in the ambassador.

VanZandt: Yes.

S. Nguyen: Yeah. And there were all the paper.

VanZandt: So husband and wife and how many children left with you?

D. Nguyen: We have three.

VanZandt: Three children.

D. Nguyen: Three children.

S. Nguyen: Two and one adult.

VanZandt: So twenty years after South Vietnam fell, you finally left.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: You lived through a lot of time [with] the Communist government.

D. Nguyen: Um-hm. I have a lot of time and so many experience with the Communists, because the Communists, I think so many people so fear, but when we share the Lord, no fear.

VanZandt: You don't have any fear when you have the Lord.

D. Nguyen: Many time they call her to come to police station.

S. Nguyen: Yeah. (showing photograph) This is our uniform in the airport.

VanZandt: Oh, in the airport.

S. Nguyen: The blue one, you know, ao dai.

VanZandt: Beautiful, blue ao dai with the white pants.

S. Nguyen: It's me at the counter.

VanZandt: (gasps) At the counter, I see.

S. Nguyen: Yeah, in Vietnam, yeah.

VanZandt: What a great job. (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) Wasn't it? Oh, my goodness. I would love to make copies of these.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And she—

S. Nguyen: And the white one, yeah.

VanZandt: Out at the airport. So this was at Tan Son Nhut Airport?

S. Nguyen: Tan Son Nhut Airport.

VanZandt: Yes. I've flown there. That's where I flew into. (laughter)

S. Nguyen: Beautiful. It's very preserved because we still have—

Phan: I have a scanner on my phone. Did you want to take some photos of them?

VanZandt: I would love—there's so many. I would love to. Maybe when we're finished recording, or if I could do it another time. I don't know how much time we have. That would be fabulous.

Phan: Oh, yeah, (inaudible).

VanZandt: Well, Reverend Nguyen, when you came to America, what did you expect to do? Did you want to minister here? Tell me about coming to the United States.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, because the old way we obey the Lord, the obedience so good to my life. So we hope whole family the Lord will bless us, whole family, so that I decide only my life and my wife share the Lord, and my children go to the church, and they go to have job, everything. But the Lord blessing our home, children. They got married, and they so good, the people, American people.

VanZandt: Are they?

D. Nguyen: And they go to the church, too, that we have. We have a happy family.

VanZandt: Do they live here?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. They live here, one couple.

VanZandt: All three children?

S. Nguyen: Youngest.

VanZandt: Youngest daughter is here. Where are the other two children?

D. Nguyen: She live in—

S. Nguyen: Two other in California.

VanZandt: In California.

S. Nguyen: One San Jose, and one in Los Angeles.

VanZandt: OK. Well, tell me about moving here to the Gulf Coast, to Mississippi. What year did you come here to Biloxi?

D. Nguyen: I come Biloxi in 1996, 1996, July, '96. But when the church have one retire, but this time the member, congregation about twenty people, and so that they want to retire. He old man.

VanZandt: Was he Vietnamese?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. He Vietnamese. And one my friend in North Carolina, he pastor of Vietnamese Assembly, too. He told me he come to preach in the church. He want

to bring to me to Biloxi to see the church and the old building and everything that (inaudible) the people.

VanZandt: What did you think when you first came here?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, I think, but I think I come, I think the very old building inside, but when I come and with the old pastor and my friend pastor and my wife, too, I pray in the sanctuary, and I cry, I cry, because I saw the building so old and so damp inside, no window and everything. And you touch many depressed(?) area in the wall. And I think, “Oh, in America.” But the old building, 1942. And the Lord spoke me. The Lord spoke, “Stay here, my son.” But I talk with the pastor, the interview, I (inaudible) and show you after one month. I pray, and I will tell you I can do; I can leave and come here or not. And after one month I pray the Lord to decide. All my children, they agree, but the first time they decide come to Oregon because one church, the bishop, big bishop of the Vietnamese Assembly, but (inaudible) want me because the old people pastor. But I pray, but the Lord don’t spoke in my heart, and my children, they don’t like. And that’s the time my wife come to the during the time near Christmastime, see the snow, everything, (laughter) so high in Oregon. She so cold, she fear. And my children say, “No, Father, you go away, one, only you.” But me not agree with the (inaudible) and so I pray I come to Biloxi when I come to see them. And I say, “Maybe, OK.” But the Lord spoke to, because the church have the home, have the building for home near the church because the old but no salary, Assembly, no salary. Abide but the Lord bless you if you help the Christian congregation, you help Christian people. You have(?) priest.

VanZandt: It will come.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, you (inaudible) income if you love the people. —

VanZandt: Was that the building on Oak Street?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, but it still there, [19]94.

VanZandt: It’s still—

S. Nguyen: This church in Vietnam, they (inaudible) before we go to the United States—

VanZandt: Before you left.

S. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: (looking at photograph) This was your church.

S. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, how beautiful.

S. Nguyen: And see (inaudible).

D. Nguyen: I have the—

VanZandt: That's you, preaching?

S. Nguyen: Yeah.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. I had a church in Vietnam, the name Daniel Church.

VanZandt: Daniel Church.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. The five church, the first five church of the Vietnamese General Council, my church one.

VanZandt: Your church named—

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

D. Nguyen: And I open, establish in the Mekong Delta, too. And so that because in Vietnam, I think the Lord used me, easily (inaudible) last trip I come to Vietnam, five place, offering the land for the building of the church. Five place because I preach for them, and they offer—

VanZandt: What is your congregation like now, Reverend Nguyen? How many—

D. Nguyen: About forty, fifty a week. If you have Tet or Christmas or everything, about seventy people. We invite to get the many guests, too.

VanZandt: And you're meeting in D'Iberville now?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. We rent a building, renting from Dr. Nguyen.

VanZandt: Dr. Nguyen.

D. Nguyen: Dr. Nguyen, and we rent the upstairs, (inaudible) upstairs.

VanZandt: Well, can I ask you? Because this community has had a very difficult time.

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Particularly the fishing community, the Vietnamese community being so tied to the seafood industry, recovering after [Hurricane] Katrina, and now the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill. People are wondering how the fishermen are doing now. It's been over one year. Can you talk about your challenges and your pastoring? How has the oil spill affected your congregation? Do you have many fishermen in your congregation?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, yeah. You think (inaudible) not good, but it can make about the oil spill in the Gulf Coast, but one pastor in California ask me, "Now, I can make, collect everything so that sometime lose the member in the church. But I thank God in the Gulf Coast in our church I see all the people, the Lord still bless them. You see if you have the fishing boat, you have about one hundred thousand during the BP—they gave the money about everything even.

VanZandt: So some of the fishermen received—

D. Nguyen: But I one thing, one thing. In our church, not a challenge because they have job in the casino. They have job in the shrimp factory. They have job by themselves, self-employed. And so nothing, I think nothing touched(?) with their lives.

VanZandt: So you feel like your parishioners are doing OK after the spill?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, they OK because in my church about, offering a week about eight hundred.

VanZandt: Eight hundred dollars?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, and but sometime more, and eight hundred [dollars], one thousand [dollars], too. But we rent the building, eleven hundred [dollars] and electric five hundred [dollars] about everything. But I think the Lord always take care the church, take care the congregation. Though I ask some people, "Do you think how about citizen now?" They say, "OK, good." Don't care. And the church not collect, but we go(?) up, especially the young people because my son-in-law, he doctor and one member doctor, and we have a nail shop, too. (laughter)

VanZandt: So they're helping.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, they offering, tithe offering, so faithful, so I think the Lord take care, know. See because we let the people do in my church. The support of a church very little for our life, but the Lord bless us.

VanZandt: The Lord has provided.

D. Nguyen: Sometime I go the others that I preach, the other church, and the (inaudible) offer me, OK.

VanZandt: So you're not hearing difficulties from fishermen who are out of work?

D. Nguyen: No, no, no.

VanZandt: And having trouble? You're not hearing that?

D. Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: That's good.

D. Nguyen: No, I don't fear because one thing the Lord promise you: the Lord take care of you. Be the first you seek the Lord and his kingdom, the Lord will do everything for you. But so that my experience from Vietnam. From Vietnam we have nothing. We empty hand, empty thing in the home, empty food, like everything. No bicycle. We ride the bicycle, and we think the Lord bring—my experience one time when I share the Lord in the Vietnam, the Lord share and support us, everything because of our prayer. Sometime I don't know where, but when a month we need, the Lord sent the right food, everything, in the home. But (inaudible) I told with my member, with congregation, *never* hungry, never lack of about food in America, but we lack of the faith in the Lord. You not obey the Lord. You not have obedience in Lord, so that you fear. When you have faith, you obey, you seek the kingdom first, never fail. The Lord never fail in your life. This (inaudible) is so strong mind, strong mind. We preach strong mind for congregation. We preach a strong blessing from God when you obey the Lord. So that we don't fear.

VanZandt: So is there anything about Vietnamese culture, traditions that you feel like has helped this community weather these storms? Leaving Vietnam, going through the war, Katrina, the oil spill. Is there anything in that culture and tradition versus the American culture and way of life that you think has helped them make it through and be so resilient?

D. Nguyen: One thing, we pray, we have the plan for sharing Gospel for Vietnamese community, but one thing the Vietnamese culture, when they have been in America *whole life* money, money, money. They don't care about God. They don't care about God. But they care about money.

VanZandt: Money.

D. Nguyen: Money, but one thing they forgot. Money where, if you have healthy body, you have a job, you have the money, but the sickness you have nothing. So that's Vietnamese culture, they serve idols. They serve for ancestors, so that's so difficult you share the Gospel, but you make relationship, loving with them because why, now we apply, we will share Gospel for the young people, go to the park on Sunday. So we do, and barbecue and food, something bring them, invite them. The Christian young people invite the unbelievers, (inaudible) with them, and we share.

You make the relationship, loving them and sometime helping them. We teach them the Vietnamese language, too.

VanZandt: To the young people.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, the young people. And we teach them about the citizenship. And so—

VanZandt: Citizenship.

D. Nguyen: Yeah, everything. And so that in future, we want to use a doctor (inaudible) for sickness for them, too, but (inaudible) with American. American have two place take care about sick people. They have Medicare; they have know everything. But they come to checking by doctor, examine by doctor. And so we pray, but the first thing, you have to plan. You have a reason. You pray, and you make the plan for your vision. I have vision of Vietnam in the Gulf Coast, the culture, the (inaudible) I know. The culture, they spend money easily for their life, and they don't care about—

VanZandt: Spend money too easily.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. They don't care. But I think now, in the Gulf Coast, they so good about oil spill. When the oil spill, they pray so much for them, too. Sometime if the last year you go to work on the shrimp boats, outside.

VanZandt: The shrimp boats.

D. Nguyen: Shrimp boats outside about ten thousand or twenty thousand [dollars] a year. The oil spill paid for them, my member. They got fifty thousand [dollars]. They go to Vietnam, go spend. So good in Vietnam, everything. Because, you know, but one thing I think, if they have wisdom, they go to God. They let their children because my daughter now she take care the teenager and the baby, you know, teach to them about how love God, about how you do, and sometime teach them about character, about attitudes and everything for them so that I think we go to Vietnamese community. But they move smoothly, neatly, slowly, friendly and took them to the church. And that the plan in the future, but if the Lord bless us, we have next plan for something for them showing, singing, when you have Christian hymn song, but like the big (inaudible) right now, run and move the (inaudible), and when they sing, they shout to the Lord, everything, like the outside, like unbelieve. You will be good now in my church we use hymn song, Houston, from (inaudible).

VanZandt: From Houston?

D. Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Vietnamese hymn books?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And we translate the Vietnamese, too.

VanZandt: Translate.

D. Nguyen: Yeah. And so we sing like the hymn song in (inaudible). And so I think that attract affection for the young people.

VanZandt: Right, for the young people, sure. So how are you reaching out more to the young people? Do you have a youth group that's active?

D. Nguyen: Yeah. We have the youth group, active, but my son-in-law, he take care. He's a good man, and when the doctor, he work captain doctor in the Keesler.

VanZandt: Oh, Keesler Air Force?

D. Nguyen: Yeah, Keesler Air Force, and his wife take care of the music in the church.

VanZandt: Music, OK.

D. Nguyen: And so they so good for the young people, and they join, and they invite so many unbelievers to come to like Holy Week or Christmas, and we come to join the church. Come to church, they like Holy Week when they carry the mask on their face, like that, we share the Gospel for them, too, and food for them.

VanZandt: Sure, that's wonderful.

D. Nguyen: But the first thing in your program, pray. You have vision, you pray, and you follow God's will, not by your will, but the Lord's will, God's will, and God will bless you.

(end of interview)